



# Austin City Manager Search Community Feedback Summary

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## Executive summary

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**The Next City Manager:** The next City Manager must be someone who'll serve as a strategic advisor to the Mayor and City Council, implement policies, and will be an advocate for all members of the community. This individual must have experience managing a City or entity with similar or larger size and scale of Austin. There are three themes surrounding skills/abilities and characteristics of the next City Manager and critical issues facing Austin over the next 5-10 years:

**Communication and Leadership:** The next City Manager must demonstrate exceptional communication skills and have a genuine willingness to listen and engage with the community. This individual must have experience managing a City or entity with similar size and scale of Austin. Residents and community stakeholders want a leader who'll have the skills and experience to lead Austin by combining vision, efficient strategy, and operational excellence together in an open, communicative style.

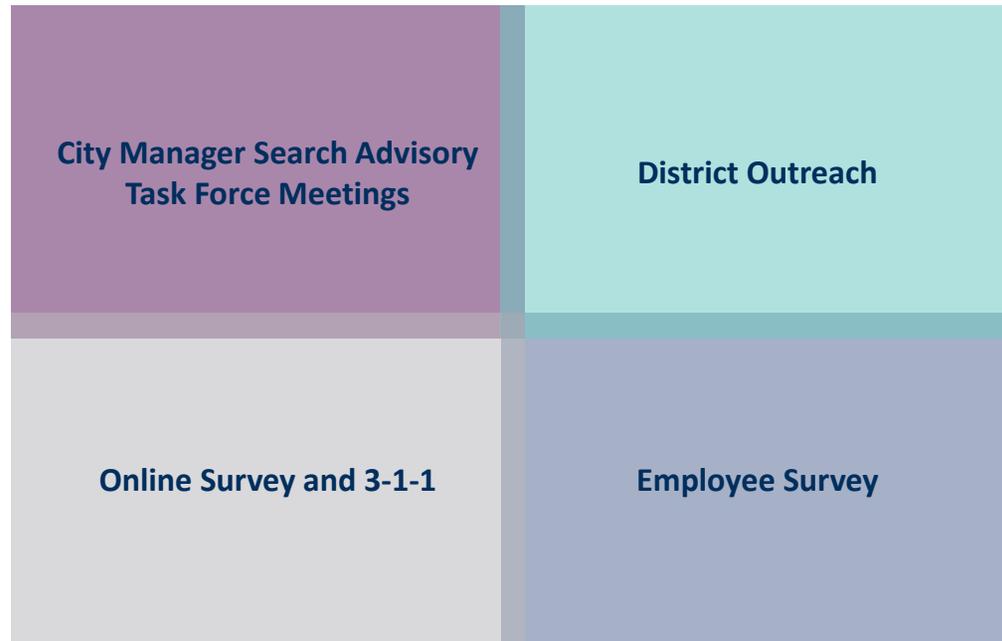
**Embrace Austin:** The next City Manager must be able to embrace Austin and the spirit of the community. This individual must support an environment of transparency, community, innovation, and open-mindedness. The next City Manager will be someone who is a proponent of diversity and inclusiveness and values the perspectives of others.

**Rapid Growth:** Rapid growth is the number one issue facing Austin across multiple areas including, but not limited to: affordability, housing, equity, transportation, maintenance, infrastructure, and funding budget requests. The next City Manager will be charged with advising key stakeholders on innovative strategies to address these issues.

# Community outreach

**Members of the Austin Community had the opportunity to participate in Phase One of the search process. There were four overlapping outreach efforts from which we collected feedback to learn more about the desired abilities, skills, and characteristics of the next City Manager as well as critical challenges facing Austin over the next 5-10 years:**

- Four public meetings were hosted by the City Manager Search Advisory Task Force.
- Community members and stakeholders were invited to speak.
- Residents were encouraged to attend and speak at each meeting.
- Residents had the opportunity provide feedback via an online survey or by calling 3-1-1.
- Over 500 online surveys were submitted; 3-1-1- received one survey.
- Responses were shared with RRA and Task Force Committee Members.



- Districts created opportunities for their constituents to participate in our search process.
- RRA received a report from each of the 10 districts.
- Reports were shared with RRA and Task Force Committee Members.
- RRA on behalf of the City of Austin, sent an online cultural analysis survey to 850 employees.
- RRA received 286 completed surveys.
- A report was shared with the Task Force Committee on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

*Outreach efforts were facilitated by the Task Force with assistance from Russell Reynolds Associates and the City of Austin.*

# Feedback themes

*RRA evaluated over 800 data points.  
Reflected below are feedback themes:*



# Skills and abilities

*What skills and abilities are most important for someone to possess to manage our city? This could include previous job experience, education, etc.*

## Previous Experience:

- “Previous experience in city management is good but just as important could be experience running a fairly large private company to gain some fiscal responsibility.”
- “Previous experience working for a City government in a locale that has experienced dramatic growth, declining diversity, and affordability issues.”
- “Demonstrated leadership, confidence, consensus builder, goal-oriented, focused, curious, good listener with excellent verbal skills and a sense of humor. Someone who can clearly articulate the city's vision. Broad work world experience--inclusive of government; non-profit and/or business world.”

## Management Style:

- “You want a leader, someone the workforce can look up to - so they can excel in their jobs. Public service is not for the faint of heart.”
- “Someone open to trying new things and not afraid of failing.”
- “We need a City Manager who has worked effectively with diverse constituencies, who is effective at building effective teams across departments to solve complex and challenging problems, and who is committed to minimizing bureaucratic processes to achieve cost-effective, efficient, and performance-based outcomes.”

## Personal Attributes:

- “They need to be an excellent communicator and analytical thinker, but also highly ethical and emotionally intelligent. A City is made up of people, so the City's leadership must display human understanding, compassion, and sympathy for citizens, as well as for City employees who are also citizens.”
- “The ability to work with diverse communities with disparate interests and agendas in a way that makes everyone feel valued and heard but in a way that is productive for the city and taxpayers.”
- “We need a City Manager that can be both a forceful advocate to the Council and also a good communicator to pass along City policy and procedures to the departmental employees.”

*What we learned from the feedback and what Residents want in their City Manager.*

- Open to someone with public or private experience; Must have experience working in an environment similar to Austin's structure.
- Must have experience addressing issues similar or related to challenges facing Austin; Experience with budgets and fiscal management is critical.
- Must be a strong communicator; Demonstrated ability to serve as a strategic advisor; Building partnerships is critical.

- Must embrace a public-service mindset and culture.
- Understands the importance of building a successful team; Manages efficiently.
- Willingness to try new innovative strategies regardless of consequences.
- Proven ability to partner, meet, and listen to a diverse group of constituents.

- Must be a strong communicator.
- Demonstrated ability to operate with a high level of ethics
- Willingness to work with a diverse group of constituents; Has the ability to connect with residents.
- Demonstrated ability to be able to partner with the Mayor and City Council.
- Can balance the needs to the community and the needs of the Mayor and City Council.

# Characteristics

*What personal characteristics are most important for our next city manager to embody to lead our unique community? Please think about the attributes that would be essential for someone to thrive in this environment.*

## **Collaborative and Open-minded**

- “Open-minded to a cross-section of the population from liberal to conservative; minority to majority; and humility in listening to new ideas to improve efficiency.”
- “Collaborator who listens to all but has the courage to do what is right for the city. This includes having the courage to say no to certain budget/resourcing requests in order to achieve priorities.”
- “Honesty, integrity, patience, commitment to transparency, willingness to carry out Council's will and to be responsive to all Council members.”
- “Austin's next manager must be prepared to lead with an open heart and mind.”

## **Thoughtful Advocate, Transparent, and Innovative**

- “A good listener who is open to the thoughts of others and respectful of what others may bring to the conversation. Thoughtful in his/her decision making process. Transparent to the public and be skillful at communicating to the public and press.”
- “The City Manager needs to understand the culture of Austin and respect the history, while nurturing growth and understanding the needs of those who have no voice.”
- “A strong drive to get things done and push for change- not fall back to we are Austin and we have always done it this way.”

## **Diversity and Inclusiveness**

- “Must have broad acceptance of diversity in people and ideas. Open-minded and able to listen with concern and sincerity. Capable of making tough decisions with confidence and clarity. Most important ability to listen and evaluate critically.”
- “The understanding and respect for diversity. Diversity as it pertains to people, business, politics and lifestyle. Core beliefs in the diversity that is essential to understand and guide this great city.”
- “A person that is inclusive, can reach out to members of the community with different points of view.”
- “A city manager needs to value diverse perspectives, fight for the under privileged, and have an eye for innovative solutions.”

*What we learned from the feedback and what Residents want in their City Manager.*

- Must be able to relate to a variety of constituents.
- Have the ability to collaborate and partner with the community and City Council.
- Demonstrates a willingness to be open-minded; respectful of opinions.
- Takes into account multiple viewpoints and values feedback from others.

- Active listener who demonstrates a thoughtful approach.
- Embraces all community groups; respects and values Austin.
- Strong communicator who encourages transparency and open dialogue.
- Push for innovative solutions based on data and feedback from others.

- Cultural sensitivity
- Proponent of diversity and inclusiveness.
- Understands the importance of reaching out to all neighborhoods.
- Values multiple viewpoints.
- Shows empathy and compassion for all.

# Critical issues facing Austin

*What do you see as the most critical challenges Austin will face over the next 5-10 years? Our next city manager is going to have to have the professional skills and personal attributes to tackle these issues, so we think it is important to provide this specific feedback to the City Council.*

## **Rapid Growth, Housing, and Affordability**

- “Growth and allowance of affordable housing for low income, minimum wage workers who are essential to the community and are being pushed out of the city which has become overpriced and overdeveloped.”
- “Affordability is key to all city planning going forward or we're fast going to lose any diversity in this city.”
- “Growth. Balancing the inevitability of sprawl with the desire to build upwards and become more dense. Mitigating the divide between the "two Austin's"...those who can afford to live and work in Austin and those who cannot.”
- “Sustainable growth that doesn't erode our environment.”

## **Equity**

- “Equity: ensuring that economic, educational, and other opportunities extend to all citizens regardless of income, race, or other factors; and that citizens are supported in pursuing these opportunities. Top-heavy prosperity for the wealthy only isn't true prosperity for the city.”
- “Equity, providing a quality life for all citizens.”
- “Equality of resources for all citizens.”

## **Transportation, Infrastructure, and Maintenance**

- “Transportation. Austin is a growing city establishing or at least laying the groundwork for continued mobility in that city is a vital issue that requires addressing.”
- “Growth and traffic, it is getting more and more difficult to move around Austin with so much construction and traffic now.”
- “Austin is very far behind the 8-ball on infrastructure.”
- “Austin's rapid growth has spiked traffic congestion and the cost of living.”
- “The most critical challenge will be maintaining city services and keeping up with infrastructure and maintenance with a population growth exceeding the revenue needed to provide these services.”

*What we learned from the feedback regarding critical issues facing Austin and the next City Manager.*

- Must be able to advocate for innovative approaches to addressing these issues.
- Demonstrated experience managing competing interest.
- Willingness to seek out data and analytics when advising the Mayor and City Council.
- Has the ability to collaborate and partner with the community and City Council.
- Takes into account multiple viewpoints and values feedback from others.
- Values the importance of equity and quality of life.
- Must have multidisciplinary expertise across a range of issues.

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## Additional feedback

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- “Austin is developing at a pace where its historic fabric is being tremendously threatened. At this rate, Austin will be an entirely fabricated city, with no true character. Austin's manager will need to celebrate the history of this beautiful city, while continuing to innovate and be a leader in sustainability, peace, and diversity- among other things”
- “The City Manager needs to understand the culture of Austin and respect the history, while nurturing growth and understanding the needs of those who have no voice. From a management perspective, he needs to hold leadership accountable and enforce fair and ethical policies.”
- “Affordability and mobility will be our biggest challenges. The city is already full and the challenges to infrastructure, the environment, equity, and daily living will continue to increase until something breaks.”
- “They would need to be public-service oriented, confident in their decisions, and willing to assert themselves in the face of resistance from both City of Austin staff or City Council.”
- “Rather than "best managed city" as a goal, hire someone who works for the most livable city.”
- “An active listener in order to take direction from City Council who are the elected voices of the people. A good organizer to be able to manage an effective team to carry out the needs of the city.”
- “We need a City Manager who is personable, an active and engaged listener, honest about the challenges and shortcomings of the City organization, open to innovation and taking calculated risks, and dedicated to continuous improvement and tangible outcomes for City initiatives.”
- “The most important thing is someone who has a heart for their community.”